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Spatial Subversion in Alexander Trocchi's *Young Adam* and *Cain's Book*

Gillian Tasker

Heterotopology was first theorised by Michel Foucault in his 1967 lecture 'Other Spaces' ('Des espaces autres'), delivered at the Cercle d'Etudes architecturales and later published in his *Dits et Ecrits* in 1994. Deriving from a medical term referring to 'tissue that is not normal where it is located, or an organ that has been dislocated heterotopia's connection to space suggests its more metaphorical practice.¹ Linguistically 'hetero-topia' is 'other-place', and these places of otherness are 'spaces of alternate ordering'.² Kenneth White has also usefully defined heterotopia as 'being a stage on the way towards what I've come to call, in general terms, *atopia*, a place radically outside commonplaces, without being a no-place' to emphasise that the heterotopia constitutes a real rather than imagined space, such as utopia.³ As 'a spatial dimension of difference', discordance is integral to the function of the heterotopia which 'is capable of juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible'.⁴ The uncanny nature of the heterotopia, their contradictory spatiality, and their implicitly subversive disruption of social norms, makes them particularly relevant to Alexander Trocchi's texts and, as I will argue, to the concept of the edge. Predominantly published in the 1950s and 1960s, Trocchi was a Glasgow-born avant-garde writer whose *oeuvre* is usually associated with French existentialism, the Beat Generation, and London's counterculture, due to his cosmopolitan lifestyle and experimental aestheticism.

Reading the novels *Young Adam* (1954) and *Cain's Book* (1960) through a spatial lens, Foucault's theory of heterotopology from 'Other Spaces' (1967) will be primarily used to explore the subversive spatiality experienced by

¹ M. Christine Boyer, 'The Many Mirrors of Michel Foucault and their Architectural Reflections' in Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (eds), *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society* (London, 2008), 56.

² Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16 (1986), 25.

³ Kenneth White, *Ideas of Order at Cape Wrath* (Aberdeen, 2013), 46.

⁴ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', 25.

Trocchi's characters in the texts. To a lesser degree, the phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard's ideas on interior space from *The Poetics of Space* (1958) will also be used alongside Foucault.⁵ Building on the notion of heterotopia as existential space, I will begin by applying the model of the ship as Foucault's 'heterotopia *par excellence*' to the barge and scow in the texts, in order to determine the extent to which Trocchi's two central protagonists encounter subversion in nautical space. I will then analyse the heterotopia of the fairground and the spatiality of the hanged man to explore their impact upon Trocchi's characterisation, before ending with a discussion of how the mirror functions as an existential device that simultaneously comprises real and unreal space. By considering Trocchi's writing alongside the various examples of heterotopia, this approach will situate Trocchi within a contemporaneous theoretical framework while also analysing the extent to which Trocchi, the self-professed 'cosmonaut of inner space', renders his characters' outward spatiality as subversive.⁶

Plucked from a pile of notes for 'Cain's Book' in *Cain's Book*, Joe Necchi reads:

It was the warmth of the sun that came on my cheek and on my hand through the open window which made me get up and go outside and find the sun already far overhead and the skyscrapers of Manhattan suddenly and impressively and irrelevantly there in a haze of heat. And as for that irrelevance ... I often wondered how far out a man could go without being obliterated. It's an oblique way to look at Manhattan, seeing it islanded there for days on end across the buffering water like a little mirage in which one wasn't involved, for at times I know it objectively and with anxiety as a nexus of hard fact. Sometimes it was like trumpets, that architecture.⁷

⁵ The combination of Bachelard and Foucault is appropriate because in 'Other Spaces' Foucault directly acknowledges Bachelard's text as complementary to his theory of heterotopia. Indeed, Bachelard's focus is on 'internal space' and Foucault's primary focus is on 'external space' (although I would argue that each theorist discusses both dimensions), and both theories are similarly rooted in, and united by, the exploration of anthropomorphic space.

⁶ The official transcript of the 1962 International Writers' Conference in Edinburgh reveals that Trocchi had first described himself as a 'cosmonaut of inner space'. On the platform on day three he stated that 'I rather sensationally described myself as a cosmonaut of inner space'. See Angela Bartie and Eleanor Bell (eds), *International Writers' Conference Revisited: Edinburgh, 1962* (Glasgow, 2012), 108.

⁷ Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book* (London, 1998), 13.

Necchi is the narrator. He is also an industrial scow captain transporting cargo around the Manhattan waterways, a struggling writer, and a heroin addict. Positioned on the edge of the city at the pier, the scow symbolises an inner world of heightened subjectivity by contrasting with the external world of objectivity symbolised by Manhattan's looming landmass. Significantly the passage reveals that Necchi feels 'far out', and this conceptually carries a double meaning. First, it linguistically links to Necchi's psychological space of the heroin-hit; 'far out' was a 1960s countercultural coinage used to signify the highly subjective mental experience of narcotic experimentation. Second, in terms of space, an existential relationship between Necchi and the environment is inferred because 'far out' also refers to the distance of the scow from land by acknowledging the space between the scow and Manhattan society. The passage describes the famous Manhattan skyline as 'suddenly and impressively and irrelevantly there', which demonstrates the deep sense of detachment that Necchi feels for everything but his own immediate environment. Trocchi's word choice of 'far out', 'obliterated', 'oblique', and 'objectively', and the repetition of 'irrelevance', also function to further highlight Necchi's acute isolation, as does the image of the city as a 'mirage'. Necchi's belief in the truth of inner self, or of inner space, is acknowledged here; 'mirage' implies that Manhattan could in fact be false, and although he knows it *is* there 'objectively' as 'a nexus of hard fact' this makes him anxious; it is only through subjectivity that Necchi believes any truth can be mediated, or found. Donatella Mazzoleni's insight is useful here: 'In the metropolitan aesthetic the eye fails in its role as an instrument of total control at a distance; once more the ears, and then the nose and skin, acquire an extra importance'.⁸ The poetic and synaesthetic imagery of the architecture being 'like trumpets' also conveys Necchi's detachment; the eye has indeed failed as 'an instrument of total control at a distance' because the city is abstract and incomprehensible: it is more like sound than anything tangible and concrete. Necchi's subversive disconnection from the city is furthered again; Manhattan is described as 'the alien city' because he is 'abstracted from it all'.⁹

The dualism between the inner and subjective space of the scow and the outer objective space of society is further elucidated in Foucault's theory of heterotopia. Perhaps most importantly, Foucault's 'Other Spaces' theorises

⁸ Mazzoleni, 1993: 297.

⁹ Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 230, 181.

that the ship specifically is 'the heterotopia *par excellence*'.¹⁰ Ships are markedly prominent throughout Trocchi's *oeuvre*: they are absolutely central to the setting of *Cain's Book* and *Young Adam* and to a lesser extent in other titles including *Helen and Desire* and *Sappho of Lesbos*. Foucault's ship corresponds to heterotopic criteria by implying freedom through its association with 'the infinity of the sea', whilst also being 'closed in on itself': 'the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea'.¹¹ Being both closed and open, the ship's spatiality is hinged on the edge and this central dualism is evident in *Cain's Book* in which the river scow can be considered in tandem with the concept of the heterotopous ship. Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* (1957) connects the ship with a coffin, stating that in certain circumstances 'the ship then is no longer a box', and he also states that, 'the ship may well be a symbol for departure; it is, at a deeper level, the emblem of closure'.¹² Gary A. Boyd's insight into Necchi's spatiality is useful here: 'The carceral significance of the boat is not lost on Trocchi who describes it in *Cain's Book*, as a 'retreat into abeyance' and whose alternatives were 'prison, madhouse, morgue'.¹³ Accordingly, Necchi's scow is described as 'a low-slung coffin on the choppy-grey water' and a motor-tug is described as being 'like a terrier pushing floating coffins'.¹⁴ In keeping with this notion of absolute closure, it is revealing that Necchi's heroin hit often takes place within the secret space of the scow. This is immediately established in the opening page: 'Half an hour ago I gave myself a fix. I stood the eye-dropper in a glass of cold water and lay down on the bunk'.¹⁵ Necchi's brazen admission makes clear that in the process of the heroin hit he seals himself off from the outside world two-fold: first, Necchi enters the self-isolated psychological sphere, and secondly, he is also physically isolated. Situated in the closed and clandestine space of the scow he is on the edge both existentially and spatially.

The barge upon which Joe works as a barge-hand in *Young Adam* can also be considered in tandem with the concept of the heterotopous ship. The barge

¹⁰ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', 27.

¹¹ Ibid., 27.

¹² Trocchi, 1993: 67, 66.

¹³ Gary A. Boyd, 'Alexander Trocchi: Glasgow through the Eye of the Needle' in Jonathan Charley and Sarah Edwards (eds), *Writing the Modern City: Literature, Architecture, Modernity* (London, 2011), 13.

¹⁴ Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 116, 181.

¹⁵ Ibid., 9.

is unable to take advantage of ‘the infinity of the sea’; instead it is confined to carrying loads on the Forth and Clyde canal, situated on Scotland’s central belt between Glasgow and Edinburgh. Joe, the narrator of *Young Adam*, is aware of the freedom that the ship and the open sea signifies, and at the start of the narrative he makes the following observation, which emphasises the closed and restricted feeling he has on the canal: ‘Beyond it on the far bank, a network of cranes and girders closed in about a ship. “To sail away on a ship like that,” I thought, “away. Montevideo, Macao, anywhere. What the hell am I doing here? The pale North”’.¹⁶ Furthering this notion, Joe also reveals that, ‘A feeling of constriction descended on me one morning as I was touching up the paintwork of the barge . . . The feeling of constriction remained with me all morning’.¹⁷ Joe finds life on the barge stifling, which is emphasised through the use of repetition. He confesses, ‘I couldn’t keep my eyes off the ships on the river, especially those which I knew would sail over the horizon into the southern hemisphere’ and he is distracted by ‘the claustrophobic atmosphere’ which was ‘still constricted and yellow, drawn in on all sides by the black spokes of the dock.’¹⁸ Psychologically Joe is trapped on the artificially constructed canals, which parallels his existential situation of being trapped in the mystery surrounding his ex-girlfriend Cathie’s death.¹⁹ Alan W. Watts claims that ‘The degree of our freedom and self-determination varies with the level which we realize to be our self – the source from which we act. As our sense of self is narrow, the more we feel our existence as restraint.’²⁰

Responding to a lack of existential autonomy, Joe feels that ‘The more I became involved in the small world of the barge, the more I felt myself robbed of my identity’; Joe’s intense isolation and lack of control over his external environment are suggested by the personification of the barge which robs his ‘identity’, and this, in combination with the constrictiveness of the canal, mirrors his trapped state of mind.²¹ Joe is existentially on the edge, and

¹⁶ Alexander Trocchi, *Young Adam* (London, 2008), 22.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 110, 111.

¹⁹ Trocchi’s text is comparable to Camus’ *The Fall* (1957), which is set in the canal-centric city of Amsterdam. Interestingly, both novels were published around the same time, and the texts bear striking thematic parallels: *The Fall* is a first-person narrative monologue, which also portrays a man’s psychological struggle after he witnesses a young woman jumping to her death off a bridge in Paris. The protagonist Clemence – like Trocchi’s Joe – does not attempt to save her, and Camus’ canal setting reflects Clemence’s constricted psychological state.

²⁰ Alan W. Watts, *Nature, Man and Woman* (New York, 1970), 135.

²¹ Trocchi, *Young Adam*, 110.

in an acknowledgment of his self-stagnation he 'wanted to break through the immobility with which I had become involved'.²² His inaction on the barge is further suggested by the following: 'Often when I woke up I had a feeling that I was in a coffin'.²³ The barge as 'coffin' is clearly aligned with the heterotopic ship as Barthes' 'emblem of closure' which pushes Joe towards the existential edge of death through his loss of self.²⁴ Gary Hentzi's claim, that 'we see how a way of life that offers the illusion of freedom and self-determination to men like Joe and Les [the barge's skipper] is in fact almost unbearably claustrophobic', is particularly pertinent.²⁵

While Joe in *Young Adam* is confined by the space of the barge, the closed and clandestine nature of the cabin in *Cain's Book* functions in contrast as a private, safe haven for Necchi. Spending the evening aboard the scow with a female companion Necchi comments, 'we talked for hours, the ambiguous presence of rain and night silence seeming to hold us closer together within the small wooden shack'.²⁶ In contrast to Foucault's perhaps negative notion of the ship being 'closed in on itself' and where constriction is equated with a loss of identity in *Young Adam*, Bachelard's consideration of enclosed interior space instead acknowledges the existential importance of what he terms 'the hut dream' whereby 'a dreamer of refuges dreams of a hut, of a nest, or of nooks and corners in which he would like to hide away, like an animal in its hole'.²⁷ Barthes' insight into the space of the ship is also useful here: 'To like ships is first and foremost to like a house, a superlative one since it is unremittingly closed ... a ship is a habitat before being a means of transport'.²⁸ Furthering Barthes' analogy of the ship as habitat, Bachelard writes that 'the house, even more than the landscape, is a 'psychic state', and even when reproduced as it appears from the outside, it speaks intimacy'.²⁹ Accordingly, Necchi rejects the outside world and outer society by forming his own alternative world on the scow: in the closed cabin he is a writer, dreamer, and junkie, but in the open space of the deck, he is a scow captain. Bachelard has acknowledged that 'philosophers, when confronted

²² Ibid., 110.

²³ Ibid., 67.

²⁴ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London, 1993), 66.

²⁵ Gary Hentzi, 'Counterculture Revisited: *Young Adam*, Then and Now', *Scottish Studies Review*, 9 (2008), 9.

²⁶ Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 130.

²⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, 1994), 31, 30.

²⁸ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 66.

²⁹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 72.

with outside and inside, think in terms of being and non-being', and in this way, the scow cabin is analogous to the house or hut, which Bachelard also fittingly describes as being in 'dynamic rivalry' with the universe.³⁰ Necchi's scow cabin is a space of intense intimacy and Barthes claims that, 'Most ships in legend or fiction are, from this point of view ... the theme of cherished seclusion'.³¹ In *Cain's Book* the scow undoubtedly parallels this typical nautical portrayal.

The dialectical nature of heterotopias does however also determine that although they are restrictive and inward, they are also spaces of liberation. Edward Soja claims that heterotopias are 'meant to detonate, to deconstruct' and in addition to functioning as a safe haven for Necchi's heroin use in *Cain's Book* the scow also functions as a space for transgressive sex; Necchi spends the night with a man and on another occasion with a married woman.³² Casare Casarino provides insight into the key relationship between heterotopic space, social practices, and bodily behaviour: 'if heterotopias are particular conceptualisations of space, then the crisis of a heterotopia will necessitate a reconfiguration of specific social practices of space, that is, of specific articulations of bodies in space.'³³ Casarino equates heterotopic space with subversive bodily behavior, and it is significant that Trocchi draws attention to the clandestine nature of the cabin in the narrative: Necchi, describing the night with his male companion, personifies the cabin believing that it was 'infecting us with its own secrecy', and he then admits that, 'it occurred to me that it was better that way'.³⁴ The heterotopic ship is also described as a 'site of alternate ordering' by Kevin Heatherington who echoes Casarino's claim that Sade's castle in *One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom* is fundamentally heterotopic because it is 'a space of unlimited individual freedom, a freedom that pays no heed to moral sanctions over one's sexual conduct'.³⁵ This notion that heterotopic space enables and permits sexual deviance is also outlined by Foucault's example of the American motel: he writes, 'a man goes with his car and his mistress where illicit sex is both absolutely sheltered and absolutely

³⁰ Ibid., 212, 47.

³¹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 67.

³² Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-imagined Places* (London, 2006), 163.

³³ Casare Casarino, *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad In Crisis* (Minnesota, 2002), 35.

³⁴ Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 65.

³⁵ Kevin Heatherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (London, 2002), 39.

hidden, kept isolated without ever being allowed out in the open'.³⁶ It is apparent, then, that as analogous to the motel, the isolated space of the scow consequently allows similarly secluded, 'absolutely sheltered and absolutely hidden' sexual freedom; the scow permits 'deviant' behaviour. Additionally, although the barge in *Young Adam* is primarily portrayed as restrictive, it is however rendered as further heterotopic by also functioning as 'a temporary passage away from power'; for Joe, who may or may not be guilty of Cathie's mysterious 'murder', the barge enables him to avoid any police inquiries. Moreover, there is also the narrative of infidelity in *Young Adam*: Joe has an illicit affair with Ella, the wife of the barge's skipper Leslie, and in doing so the space of the barge (the recurrent site of the affair) disrupts the social norm. Creating such covert reciprocity between characterisation and spatiality enables Trocchi to deepen his characterisation while the use of heterotopic space furthers the surreal sense of dislocation that Joe experiences aboard the barge and which adds to the uncanny and unsettling atmosphere of the narrative; like Joe who is out on the edge of things in heterotopic space the reader is situated in an uncanny and uncertain narrative space because they are unsure of whether what Joe reveals is the actual truth.

The conflicting duality of the heterotopia has led to the claim that 'the space of the ship is the heterotopia of modernity as crisis'.³⁷ This dualism responds to the traditional purpose of the ship (colonialism, imperialism etc.) while also acknowledging that the ship is also a symbol of cultural and mythical. Indeed, while the ship is 'the greatest instrument of economic development' and a symbol of Western success, Foucault also recognises that heterotopias 'dissolve our myths'.³⁸ Significantly, the scow in *Cain's Book* destabilises this traditional, mythical standpoint; although Necchi is employed as a scow captain, he rarely engages in any actual hard graft and he is portrayed as almost always lying around: 'lying on the bunk', 'I had been lying in the bunk for over an hour', 'I found myself lying on my bed', 'we lay down on the bed', 'I spent most of my time lying on the roof of my shack'.³⁹ The scow is not a place of productivity but a place of idleness and experiment. Necchi smokes, indulges in illicit sex, philosophises, and gets high on heroin and it is apparent that Necchi indeed attempts to cultivate as 'vast amount of leisure' as possible. Joe is similarly lazy; he and Leslie are

³⁶ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', 27.

³⁷ Casarino, *Modernity at Sea*, 34.

³⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York, 2002), xix.

³⁹ Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 10, 65, 123, 132, 183.

described as frequently feeling ‘a bit uncomfortable there on deck and doing nothing because Ella never seemed to stop working’.⁴⁰ In ‘Other Spaces’, Foucault suggests that retirement homes are exemplars of what he terms ‘heterotopias of deviation’ because, ‘since in our society where leisure is the rule, idleness is a sort of deviation’.⁴¹ Both texts’ protagonists are well aware of the importance of being idle; by breaking with the norm of productivity and labour in capitalist society, the scow and barge are analogous to the unexpectedly subversive space of the rest home.

Foucault outlines a different type of heterotopia – ‘heterochronies’ – in ‘Other Spaces’.⁴² Specifically embodying temporal discontinuity, Foucault argues that these ‘function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time’, and such heterotopias, he suggests, are cemeteries, fairgrounds, ‘primitive’ vacation villages, museums, and libraries.⁴³ Foucault proposes that fairgrounds are specifically heterotopic because they are ‘marvelous empty sites on the outskirts of cities that teem once or twice a year with stands, displays, heteroclit objects, wrestlers, snakewomen, fortune-tellers, and so forth’.⁴⁴ In *Young Adam* it is significant that there is a fairground in the narrative:

As evening approached, Clowes came in sight: another small canal town, more industrial than Lairs.

We noticed the fair immediately. The marquees were pitched in the fields to the left which bordered the canal, and the hurdy-gurdy music was suspended in the atmosphere for a long time before we saw them, or the stalls or the brightly painted caravans and lorries.⁴⁵

The fair is positioned spatially on the edge – the marquees are pitched on the fields ‘which bordered the canal’ – and accordingly, the scene has an odd and oneiric quality: the music is uncannily described as being ‘suspended in the atmosphere for a long time’ which contrasts with the immediacy of the ‘real’ time in which Joe and the others ‘noticed the fair’. Time is also on the edge because Joe encounters the fair at the end of the day ‘as evening

⁴⁰ Ibid., 27.

⁴¹ Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, 25.

⁴² Ibid., 26.

⁴³ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁵ Trocchi, *Young Adam*, 71–2.

approached', which adds to the strangeness of the scene, as does the double heterotopia of the barge and the fair. Consequently, the time of the fair appears analogous to what Foucault calls 'time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival'.⁴⁶ In *Cain's Book* the heterotopia of the fairground is also the setting for an existential moment on the edge, and once again, Trocchi uses heterotopic space to highlight Necchi's existential experience of alienation and dislocation through the 'far out' spatiality of the scow:

5 a.m. Tug came for three of us before midnight. We moved line ahead over the dark water past Brooklyn towards Coney Island. My scow was at the stern of the tow. The ferris wheel was still alight. I felt rather than saw the activity as we drew nearer. Faint sounds. Suddenly round the point on our starboard side the unutterable night of the Atlantic, big, black, and menacing; there was no more light from the Jersey coast. From now until we gained the lee of Rockaway Point we were in open sea.

I'd heard about it from some of the other scowmen but I hadn't thought much about it, how a flat-bottomed scow loaded down almost to the gunwales with a thousand ton of stone, and slung in a chain of scows behind a tug, moves when it is suddenly struck broadside by the black Atlantic.

It struck me as funny tonight that it should take place off Coney Island in sight of the ferris wheel and all that crazy-motion machinery.⁴⁷

The lights of the famous Coney Island ferris wheel brutally and uncannily remind Necchi that he is alone on the 'big, black, and menacing' open sea, while also adding to the unsettling and surreal atmosphere. Against the backdrop of Coney Island's fairground frivolity, Necchi goes on to describe having 'the impression of tottering at the night edge of a flat world. Then I was going down like you go down on a rollercoaster'.⁴⁸ He is then 'aware of the Atlantic rising like a sheet of black ink high on my starboard and blotting out even the night sky' and admits then that 'it occurred to me that I might be about to die'.⁴⁹ Trocchi directly aligns the experience of the fairground with Necchi's

⁴⁶ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', 7.

⁴⁷ Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 143.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 142.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 142, 143.

terrifying on-board experience; the out-of-time and surreal spatiality of the fairground is mirrored by, but also emphasised by, Necchi's intense existential ordeal. Like the fairground that he hauntingly sees on the land, Necchi experiences a similar disruption of 'traditional time' because he is positioned so close to death aboard the scow during the storm. This notion of being suddenly close to death is an integral element of the fairground rollercoaster experience too; the rider is aware that they are entering a potentially precarious danger zone of intensity and unpredictability. The three-way reciprocity that Trocchi renders between Necchi's experience of the storm, the scow, and the fairground, works well in the text by also concomitantly furthering the reciprocity between characterisation and environment: the subversive double heterotopia of the scow and the fair effectively emphasises Necchi's spatial and existential on the edge experience.

Bachelard uses the term 'ambiguous space' to describe when 'the mind has lost its geographical homeland and the spirit is drifting'.⁵⁰ This seems apt to apply to Necchi's experience of the storm because aboard his mastless and engineless vessel in the ambiguous space of the sea he is unable to take control. Rather, he is at the mercy of the elements because he is entirely reliant on the tugboat to which he is tied. However he knows that the lines to the tug are also unreliable and if they failed he would be left 'without power' after which 'my scow would be so much flotsam in the Atlantic'.⁵¹ Acknowledging that the tug must take another turn in order to secure his scow, Necchi saw that there was 'Not much of his line left, after which I in my weighted coffin would drift off alone into the night'.⁵² Not an elevated 'heterotopia *par excellence*', the scow is instead reminiscent of the Ship of Fools. In Book VI of *The Republic*, Plato tells a parable which warns of the dangers of being directionless and powerless. Plato uses the ship as an example and describing a mutiny: 'befuddling the worthy master with mandrake, or alcohol, or something else, they [the crew] take control of the ship and as they sail use up everything on board and drink and gorge themselves as you'd expect men like this to do'.⁵³

Necchi, who is almost always intoxicated, is here voyaging in such a manner as might be 'expected': as an addict who is absolutely reliant on the drug to stabilise him and to provide his daily direction to get their fix, the scow is similarly absolutely reliant on the tugboat as its lifeline because without it,

⁵⁰ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 218.

⁵¹ Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 143

⁵² Ibid., 144.

⁵³ Plato, *Republic*, Books 6–10 (Harvard, 2013), 21.

the scow is completely powerless and directionless. Indeed, Necchi appears to self-reflexively acknowledge this, perhaps making an indirect reference to Plato's parable: looking over notes from his work-in-progress 'Cain's Book' he reads, 'I am alone again and write it down to provide anchorage against my own mutinous winds'.⁵⁴ It is significant that Trocchi correlates the act of writing with the figurative position of the ship on the sea; once again, there is a detectable exchange between Necchi's existentialism and the external environment.

In *Young Adam*, Joe is a self-acknowledged drifter, 'a rootless kind of man' who has severed his connection to what Bachelard called the 'geographical homeland'.⁵⁵ However, it is intriguing that he connects his sense of self to the canal:

Of all the jobs I had been forced to do I think I liked being on the canal best. You are not tied up in one place as you are if you take a job in town, and sometimes, if you can forget how ludicrously small the distances are, you get the impression that you are travelling. And there is something about travelling.⁵⁶

The passage suggests that Joe's existential directionless is partly remedied by his job on the barge. It continually moves him from one place to another, albeit linearly from one point on the canal through what Gary A. Boyd aptly calls 'the unrelenting horizontality of the canal'.⁵⁷ Indeed, while Necchi is aboard a rudderless and engineless vessel, Joe's barge is propelled by power, and it is apparent that the movement of the characters, and accordingly the degree of their existential angst, is shaped by these spatial factors.⁵⁸ The connection between Joe's identity and the water is furthered by Joe's discovery of Cathie in the Clyde. Jean-Paul Sartre has acknowledged the connection between water and ontology writing 'water is the symbol of consciousness – its movement, its fluidity, its deceptive appearance of being solid, its perpetual

⁵⁴ Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 230.

⁵⁵ Trocchi, *Young Adam*, 110.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁷ Boyd, 'Alexander Trocchi: Glasgow', 150.

⁵⁸ Gary A. Boyd has also identified an analogy between the barge in *Young Adam* and the *Ship of Fools*. He uses Foucault's example of the *stultifera navis* from *Madness and Civilisation* to argue that the barge mirrors 'the constrained and austere environment of a late nineteenth-century institution of confinement' See *ibid.*, 152.

flight – everything in it recalls the For-itself'.⁵⁹ This is particularly true of Joe's consciousness (the 'For-itself'), which is absolutely connected to the water because it relentlessly reminds him of Cathie. Consequently, it is apparent that the physical fluidity *of* the water gives Joe essentially fluid lifestyle *on* the water, and yet this notion of liquid is particularly poignant: caught between being guilty and innocent Joe is indeed formless. Mirroring the water which 'does not rebound, never moves into reverse', Joe is similarly unable to reverse because he is unable to change the course of events that lead to Cathie's tragic death and to his own existential crisis.

Another instance of spatial subversion is evident in *Young Adam* through the symbol of the hanged man, an important leitmotif throughout Trocchi's writing trajectory to the extent that Edwin Morgan identifies that it is one of Trocchi's 'incidental similarities'.⁶⁰ While the hanged man in-itself is not heterotopic, the unusual spatiality of the body in a hanged position fundamentally is. By being suspended in an unnatural position between earth and sky, the atypical spatiality of the body corresponds with what Foucault in 'Other Spaces' outlines as 'crisis' heterotopias: spaces of ritualistic practices 'reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis'.⁶¹ In *Young Adam* the hanged man symbolically suggests the fate of the criminal sentenced to death, and hanging is indeed an ancient and ritualistic practice. Therefore, with the hanged man symbolising the brutal fate of the criminal, the unique spatiality of death by suspension relates to Foucault's concept of the individual being situated in a ritualistic heterotopic space – and existential state – of 'crisis'.

Trocchi implies the notion of hanging early on in *Young Adam*, which he then later develops to explicit effect. It is first subtly suggested in part one of the text, when Joe makes a seemingly standard observation from the deck of the barge: 'I could see a boom raised ahead in the distance. It looked very awkward perched there in mid-air like a sign that meant nothing but was black in the thin meagre afternoon light.'⁶² Joe acknowledges the uncomfortable, 'awkward' position of the ship's boom in its suspension half way between sea and sky. This heterotopic position has an eerie significance;

⁵⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (London, 2010), 631.

⁶⁰ Edwin Morgan, 'Alexander Trocchi: A Survey' in Allan Campbell and Tim Niel (eds), *A Life in Pieces: Reflections on Alexander Trocchi* (Edinburgh, 2010), 50. The symbol of the hanged man also appears in *Cain's Book*, but its inclusion is less obvious than in *Young Adam*.

⁶¹ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', 24.

⁶² Trocchi, *Young Adam*, 42.

although Joe thinks at the time that it looked 'like a sign that meant nothing', the boom's position is arguably analogous to that of a body on a noose. This 'sign' then, if taken to suggest hanging by the gallows, ironically turns out to have a horrible connection; in addition to its destabilised spatiality, the hanged man as an image covertly highlights the impending sense of doom that Joe feels as he struggles to come to terms with the trial of the innocent Daniel Goon for the alleged 'murder'. Hanging is suggested again through Trocchi's covert use of imagery in part three, when Joe finally abandons Ella and leaves the barge. He rents a temporary room in Glasgow, which he describes as follows: 'the bits of furniture seemed to be suspended in mid-air and I had the impression that I was within a shaft with unsubstantial furniture around me, and that below, where no floor was, the shaft continued downwards without sensible bottom.'⁶³

Joe's bizarrely sinister vision of the room-as-gallows occurs on the night before the first court date, and it arguably reflects his anxious, guilt-ridden state of mind because he is aware that Goon, if found guilty, would be sentenced to death. The following day, propelled by a mixture of guilt and a perverse curiosity, Joe consults an issue of the *British Medical Journal* at an unspecified 'large public library', in which he reads the entry on hanging.⁶⁴ As akin to the boom that Joe somewhat innocently saw on the canal, the entry on hanging also implies a heterotopic spatiality because in its hanged position, the corpse is suspended in an uncanny and unsettling state that subverts the normal spatial order of the body. Existing in a space of heterotopic 'crisis' by rejecting the normal grounding of the body on terra firma, the disturbing spatiality of the hanged man's body in its suspended position responds to Joe's own unstable existential position: he too is suspended as he waits to find out the fate of Goon. Indeed, this is in keeping with the novel's narrative development, which climactically builds to the final court scene when Goon is found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging.

John Pringle has written that throughout Trocchi's *oeuvre* 'sex is never far from death'.⁶⁵ Continuing the concept of a more abstract heterotopic space, this is suggested in spatial terms by the canal in *Young Adam*, which connects sex and death simultaneously. Aboard the barge, Joe frequently observes chimneys and church towers rising up into the sky; a brick factory stack is described as 'enveloped in a stagnant mushroom of its own yellow smoke' and this use of

⁶³ Ibid., 137.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 149.

⁶⁵ John Pringle, 'Introduction' in Alexander Trocchi's *Young Adam* (New York, 2003), vi.

phallic imagery figuratively suggests life.⁶⁶ The canal is also eerily personified: 'Now it was dark and the water was there as a witness. It forced itself upon me, a sound, a smell, present as we walked'.⁶⁷ The canal's dominance is depicted by the description of its synesthetic qualities, and although its description as 'a witness' seems an innocent enough observation at this point in the narrative, when it is later revealed that Joe was involved with Cathie's death this has highly sinister undertones; the water was the sole witness to what actually happened between Joe and Cathie. Disturbingly, Joe also relates the industrial landscape to first finding Ella sexually attractive: 'She had come to me suddenly, a woman hanging out washing with a vacant lot and a factory chimney in the background'.⁶⁸ The phallic image of the factory chimney again concomitantly connects Ella with sex and the topography of the canal, and this allows Trocchi to further fuse landscape and character.

This sexual association with death is developed further through the macabre 'brainwave' that Joe experiences on the day that he discovers Cathie's corpse: 'I wanted to talk about Ella, about how she suddenly came to me, like a brainwave, on the very day we dragged the dead woman from the river'.⁶⁹ Joe's admission more than merely hints at necrophilia, and this notion underlines Ella and Joe's illicit affair which starts shortly after Cathie's corpse is discovered; they have sex on the barge and on the banks of the canal, which further fuses the canal with life and death. This is also evident at the start of the text: 'As I leant over the edge of the barge with a boathook I didn't think of her as a dead woman, not even when I looked at the face. She was like some beautiful white water-fungus, a strange shining thing come up from the depths'.⁷⁰

The reader first encounters the canal under these horrifying and macabre circumstances, which clearly connects the canal, the barge, and Cathie (the unidentified human flotsam); it is apparent that the canal is rendered as such a space, where sex (thus life) and death are intimately fused. Indeed, the interplay between death and life is absolutely symbolised by Cathie's corpse; Joe and Cathie have sex on the edge of the Clyde on the night she dies and it is also later revealed that she was pregnant with Joe's child. In this way, Cathie becomes a literal embodiment of the water's uncanny heterotopic spatiality

⁶⁶ Trocchi, *Young Adam*, 41.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

of life and death; she experiences the orgasmic 'minor' or 'little death', and afterwards, actual death.

It is intriguing that Cathie and Joe's relationship appears to be fundamentally built upon the dynamic of life and death. This is again represented in *Young Adam*, when Joe describes Cathie's death to explain why he 'knew she couldn't swim':

A summer's day perhaps, not far from shore somewhere off the west coast, and we would be lying naked on the bottom boards under the seats. She was more passionate that way than any other, because she knew she couldn't swim, because our erotic struggle in the drifting boat represented for her a life and death matter. It was not only her body which prostrated itself in the flimsy shell of the dinghy. It was her life she gambled with, uttering little screams of delirious pleasure when a chance wave decapitated itself on the gunwale and splashed like quicksilver about her buttocks.⁷¹

The flashback conveys a direct interplay between Cathie's experience and the outer environment; the waves are part of her erotic pleasure, and her inability to swim heightens not only the danger but also her desire. On the surreal spatiality of the heterotopic dinghy, it is clear that Cathie experiences an erotic thrill by being pushed to the existential edge between life and death, and in the uncanny space of the dinghy, Cathie experiences a sexual synthesis between herself and the environment.

Building on the exchange between inner identity and outer environment, Trocchi uses the mirror as an existential emblem throughout *Young Adam*. It is worth noting that Trocchi employs the mirror at the very start of the narrative: the reader first encounters Joe (although at this point he is anonymous) self-consciously scrutinising: 'this morning, the first thing after I got out of bed, I looked in the mirror'.⁷² Joe then goes on to meticulously study his appearance, describing how it had changed 'unperceptively during the night', and observing: 'Nothing out of place and yet everything was, because there existed between the mirror and myself the same distance; the same break in continuity which I have always felt to exist between acts which I committed yesterday and my present consciousness of them.'⁷³

⁷¹ Ibid., 90.

⁷² Ibid., 19.

⁷³ Ibid., 19.

This opening immediately highlights Joe's narcissistic nature and the existential dualism he experiences due to the distance between the physical-self and the image-self in the mirror. Joe shows that he is highly aware that the mirror disrupts continuity, and his experience of self-disassociation is brought on by the uncanny nature of the mirror. Foucault usefully argues that the mirror is fundamentally heterotopic in 'Other Spaces':

In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my worn visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent ... From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there.⁷⁴

Foucault implicitly interlinks notions of distance and absence through the 'unreal virtual space' of the mirror, an embodiment of 'I am there where I am not', and indeed, the mirror 'reflects the context in which I stand yet contests it'.⁷⁵ Joe struggles to simultaneously identify with his perceiving-self and his image-self, and this conflict parallels M. Christine Boyer's claim, that the mirror is a heterotopic 'place of devilish doubling'.⁷⁶ The mirror for Joe is indeed doubly devilish where through his inability to wholly identify he struggles to see himself as an absolute and consistent being. By beginning the narrative with this scene, Trocchi instantly introduces the notion of unstable identity by inferring the disconnection - both physical and psychological - that Joe feels when presented with his mirrored-self. Upon seeing his reflection Joe also muses: 'I don't ask whether I am 'I' who looked or the image which was seen'.⁷⁷ Joe clearly experiences an existential crisis of identity in the mirror: he is simultaneously subject (the looking 'I') *and* object (the looked at 'image'). Furthermore, Trocchi playfully uses linguistics to highlight Joe's dual-status as subject/object: the 'I' (subject) is set against the conflicting notion of 'I' as the 'image' (object). In the space of the mirror which is hinged on the edge between the real and the reflected, Joe's subjective 'I' is disconnected from his objectifying 'eyes', and again, he existentially discontinuous.

Significantly, Trocchi again returns to the heterotopic mirror in order to

⁷⁴ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', 24.

⁷⁵ Boyer, 'The Many Mirrors of Michel Foucault', 54

⁷⁶ Ibid., 54

⁷⁷ Trocchi, *Young Adam*, 19.

highlight Joe's self-dichotomy during the novel's denouement. Joe, driven by a conflicting mixture of guilt and curiosity, attends the penultimate court trial of Daniel Goon for Cathie's 'murder'. The following excerpt is a crucial point in the novel's narrative development:

As soon as I was seated I began for some reason or another to think of my shaving mirror. I remembered on more than one occasion I had dropped it and I was being continually surprised by the fact that it didn't break. No matter how often I repeated to myself that it was made of metal I could not rid myself of the response to expectation that it would break. Why did I think of that then?⁷⁸

The mirror's fundamental doubleness literally reflects Joe's doubleness as either guilty or innocent. It seems apparent that Joe's awareness of his precarious position is heightened through looking at himself in the mirror; Joe could (or should) be on trial instead of Goon, and if found to be guilty, he would be sent to the gallows. The mirror can also be seen to figuratively function to further reflect Joe's fragmented identity, as both Cathie's ex-boyfriend, but also as Cathie's possible killer. Joe has a secret double-identity, and by self-consciously probing, 'why did I think of that then?' it can be suggested that he, perhaps subconsciously, acknowledges that the mirror highlights his self-fragmentation. Foucault also ascertains that the mirror is 'the frailest duplication of representation', and whilst Joe is arguably aware of its duplicative nature, he is also aware of its frailty; Joe worries that his secret will be revealed and that he might mirror the mirror by breaking.⁷⁹

In *Cain's Book* Trocchi again uses the heterotopic spatiality of the mirror to suggest fragmented and unstable identity; referring to the ancient myth of Narcissus he uses 'Cain at his orisons, Narcissus at his mirror' as an epigraph.⁸⁰ Although its textual placement appears to be random because the prose that follows does not appear to be directly related to the statement, covertly, the epigraph functions to quickly introduce the concept of inconsistent identities to the reader. Indeed, despite this early reference to Narcissus, when Necchi looks in the mirror later in the narrative, he experiences an inversion of Narcissus' attempt to self-unify. Eerily, the nickname of William Burroughs' narrative persona in *Naked Lunch* is 'El Hombre Invisible – The Invisible

⁷⁸ Ibid., 143.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 335

⁸⁰ Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 10

Man'.⁸¹ Trocchi presents a similar vision of the addict's experience when Necchi makes a similarly haunting self-observation: 'If I had looked in a mirror and seen no reflection there I feel I wouldn't have been unduly startled. The invisible man'.⁸² The absence of any self-recognition is disturbing, and this representation of Necchi's body (or more accurately the *lack* of representation) can also be read as an inversion of Lacan's mirror stage, the definitive moment of self-recognition in a child's development. As an adult whose sense of self is supposed to be firmly established, Necchi's failure to affirm his own self-recognition in the mirror is abnormal; as a heroin-fuelled 'cosmonaut of inner space' he seems unable to experience a relationship with anything outside of himself, not even his own reflection.

Erica Carter and James Donald specify that space differs from place because it is inherently more ambiguous:

How does space become place? By being named: as the flows of power and negotiations of social relations are rendered in the concrete form of architecture; and also, of course, by embodying the symbolic and imaginary investments of a population. Place is space to which meaning has been ascribed.⁸³

Carter and Donald place emphasis on place as anthropomorphic space, as lived space that derives meaning from being socially populated and consequently named. In contrast, the multiple examples from *Young Adam* and *Cain's Book* all show that the heterotopias – the ship, the fairground, the canal, the spatiality of the hanged man, and the mirror – are not defined or 'named' places but more abstract and often 'meaningless' spaces. It is also apparent that in these various spaces Necchi and Joe often experience reciprocity with the external environment; in both texts Trocchi implicitly associates outer space with the protagonists' inner existential experiences, which are often subversive or disturbing like the heterotopic spaces that they encounter. By being built on conflict the subversive nature of the heterotopia means that space in the narratives is never rendered fixed, and as a dialectical model of fluid and existential space the heterotopia ideally responds to, and affirms, the concept of the edge: formed from oppositional elements, heterotopias are always on

⁸¹ William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (London, 1993), 63.

⁸² Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 70.

⁸³ Erica Carter and James Donald, 'Introduction' in idem (eds), *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location* (London, 1993), xii.

the edge between elements because they are 'simultaneously mythic and real'.⁸⁴ It is fitting to end with Tom McCarthy who writes that a fundamental question in *Cain's Book* is 'where's that edge's edge, the point beyond which you fall off?: heterotopia is both the space of, and beyond, the edge.'⁸⁵

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⁸⁴ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', 24.

⁸⁵ Tom McCarthy, 'A Moveable Void' in Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book* (Richmond, 2011), vi.